

No. 25. On Easter-Day.

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118th Psalm, 24th.

This is the Day which the Lord hath made, we will
rejoice and be glad in it.

"If in this life only we have hope," says the
Apostle, "we are of all men most miserable." Our
Saviour's "kingdom was not of this world," neither
were his subjects to expect their reward here. But He
foretold them what distress and persecution should befall
them; "in the world ye shall have tribulation." Yea
He bade them "to take up their cross and lie down
"their lives for his sake." So that had it not been
for the prospect of a future state of happiness, the Gos-
pel would not have met with so good success, nor shewed
itself and its Author "able to overcome the world."
It was "the crown of righteousness laid up for him in
"Heaven," which made St. Paul rejoice in his suffer-
ings, and fortified him against his martyrdom. And
this second life and immortality, Christ not only re-
vealed and promised to all such as would fight under

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his banner, but also by his rising from the dead, He both shewed the possibility, and gave them an earnest and pledge of their own resurrection.

Having for some days past been meditating on the passion, death, & burial of our Blessed Redeemer, and, having by sorrow for sin, suffered, in some sort, with Him; our Church calls upon us now to commemorate his glorious victory over death, that as our sorrow attended Him to the cross and the grave, so our cheerful hearts should solemnize his triumph. We are not now "as men without hope;" we may comfort one another with the Angels words to the women who came to anoint his dead body, "He is risen, He is not here." And we may take up the Psalmist's expression in the text; This is the day, &c.

This Psalm seems intended to congratulate King David upon his full and undisturbed possession of the kingdom, after the Ark was brought to Jerusalem. But, by way of Prophecy, it had respect to Christ the son of David; and we find part of it so applied both

by our Saviour, [Matt. xxi. 42.] and by St. Peter, [1 Peter ii. 4.] and, accordingly the Church, understanding it of our Saviour's resurrection, hath appointed it as a proper Psalm for the evening service of this day. We will therefore take the words in this prophetic sense, and say—this is the happy day which the Lord Christ hath made illustrious by his miraculous rising from the dead; and it becomes us to celebrate it with joyful hearts, and with all expressions of gladness for so great a benefit.

In my following discourse, I shall consider why this, above any other, may be called the day which the Lord hath made.

2dly, What reason we Christians have to rejoice & be glad in it. And,

Lastly, wherein our joy is to be expressed.

This festival is observed to perpetuate the memory of Christs rising from the grave—for "it was not possible He could be holden of it." The stone was easily rolled away; the grave clothes were as easily

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shaken off, and the watch, tho' awake, as unable to secure Him as if they had "been dead men." The Apostles, who were to preach the Gospel to the world, thought it a principal part of their office to bear witness to Christ's resurrection; and being fully convinced of the truth of it, by conversing with Him familiarly for so many days after He was risen, they took especial care it should be inserted into the Creed which was delivered to the Church.

As for the time of our Saviour's rising, we read that it was upon the first day of the week, the third day of his death, including that whereon He died as one, and that whereon He rose as another. For He died on the preparation or eve of the sabbath, which was the sixth day, He rested in the grave all the sabbath or seventh day, and the day after, being the first day of the next week, He left his fetters and prison, and triumphed over them. Our Saviour indeed says "after three days He would rise again." But this is easily reconciled, if we observe that, in computation of

time, part of a day was to be reckoned for the whole day. It is sufficient, therefore, if Christ's body were in the grave but part of the three days. And as for the phrase of three days and three nights, it was only the Jewish way of expressing three days.

As the death of Christ was to be the Price of our Redemption, it was as necessary for us to be confirmed in the belief of that, as well as of his resurrection (for without our belief of his death we could have no ground to hope for pardon of our sins.) He was therefore contented to continue some time in the state of the dead, that He might thereby assure us of our Ransom's being paid.

But then, on the other hand, his stay there was not to be long, because of his disconsolate Disciples: their hopes forsook, and their hearts misgave them. And as Peter was afraid to acknowledge himself for His Disciple, while He was yet alive; so now, after He was dead, they all kept themselves close for fear of the Jews, from whom they expected no better treatment

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than their Lord had met with. His presence then being necessary to cheer their drooping spirits, He hastened his return: He rose in triumph, and "led captivity captive." Besides, having proved himself truly dead, and endured all that he undertook for us, it was but reasonable He should now enter upon his triumphant state: and by rising again, whilst his sufferings were fresh in the people's thoughts, He might satisfy them that it was even He himself, raised with the same body which they had so lately crucified.

Now by our Saviour's rising from the dead He completed the redemption not of a particular nation, but of mankind, not from a temporary servitude, but from eternal death: it was indeed a far greater and more general deliverance than that of the Israelites out of their Egyptian bondage. For the better imprinting this blessing on the souls of men, and for a thankful commemoration of it, the Feast of Easter was instituted—a Festival, the most ancient of all

others, in the Christian Church, ordained and celebrated in the first ages of it, while some of the Apostles were alive—a Feast received with so unanimous affection throughout the world, that, though some difference happened about the time, yet there was never any question made of the feast itself.

I now proceed to shew, in the 2d place, what reason we Christians have to rejoice and be glad in this day.

The sufferings and death of our Saviour would have availed us but little, if his resurrection had not followed. "If Christ be not raised your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins." His Disciples could have had but small hopes of another life after this, if He had not risen, and made them eye-witnesses of the life and immortality promised by Him. For how should any man think He should give life to them, who could not restore himself to life? Tho' He continued so short a time in the grave their faith began to stagger; and then certainly his not rising again

would have brought them to the same piece of mockery with the scribes and elders, "He pretended to save others, himself He cannot save." But by rising from the dead, and by reuniting the body and soul, "He is declared the son of God with power."

He hath given full proof of himself & his doctrine that they were from God; and confirmed the faith of his Disciples. A greater evidence could not be given nor desired; for "God heareth not sinners," neither would He have raised a deceiver. After his resurrection we find the Apostles, instead of hiding themselves for fear, bearing witness boldly before the council to Jesus and the resurrection; and so far from being discouraged by their scourgings and threats, that "they rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer for his name."

Our justification is often in scripture attributed to Christ's resurrection, "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." He, dying for us and for our sins, in his own deliverance from death, God declared that He had freed

us from it, and from sin the cause of it. Death is the curse and punishment due to sin. Had we not been sinners, Christ had never died; so that had He continued in the grave, He would still have been under the curse, and not have fully paid our debt, which He had taken upon himself. But as his dying bespeaks him a debtor, so his rising again is his discharge, and shews him to have satisfied his Father's justice. He stands in our place. "He, who knew no sin, is made sin for us." "Moses, by God's command, spake unto the children of Israel, saying, when ye come into the land which I give unto you, & shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest unto the Priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you." For under the Levitical law all the fruits of the earth, in the land of Canaan, were profane, and none might eat of them till they were consecrated, which was done in the feast of the first fruits. One sheaf was taken out of the

field and brought to the Priest, who lifted it up in the name of all the rest, waving it before the Lord: and by God's accepting this in the name of the whole, all the rest of the sheafs became holy. For "if the first fruits be holy, the lump also is holy."

Another benefit we are to consider, is, That Christ's resurrection assures us of our own. "I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen, and have the keys of hell and the grave." By his rising He hath obtained a conquest over death, and a power to free us from it. For that power by which He himself arose, is able also to quicken and revive our mortal bodies. And as upon Adam's sin, all that partake of his nature are concluded under the sentence of death pronounced against him; so all regenerate Christians shall be raised by Christ to immortal life. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." "As the Father hath life in himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in

"himself." Our Lord calls himself the root, and if that have life it will doubtless communicate its virtue to us, the branches. He is our head and we are his members; and therefore He will take care, that where He is, there we may be also. "Son of man, can these dry bones live?" is a question which might not improperly have been asked: but seeing our nature is risen before in Him, we can now hope to follow after Him. "Blessed, for ever blessed, be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Thus then the benefits procured for us by the death and resurrection of Christ are very great, and such as will undoubtedly make the soul happy for ever; for eternal happiness is one of the benefits accruing from his resurrection.

I now proceed to the last consideration—wherein our joy for this day is to be expressed by us.

We shall all rise and "appear before the judg-
 ment seat of Christ, who will render to every man
 according to what he hath done in the body—to
 them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek
 for glory and immortality He will give eternal
 life: but tribulation and anguish to every man that
 doeth evil." And therefore if we would reap any
 true joy and comfort from this day of His resurrection,
 we must live like men that expect their own, and a
 life of happiness after it. Death is called a change;
 and indeed it is a mighty change, though not to all
 men the same. It is like St. James's unimagin-
 able fountain that "sends forth sweet water & bitter."
 To the wicked tis a change for a far worse, but to good
 men for a much better condition. And the like may
 be said on a due meditation upon this day. To such
 as will not break off their sins by unfeigned repen-
 tance, and seriously resolve to walk with their risen
 Saviour in newness of life, to hear that they are
 not to perish in the grave, but must rise again

and give an account of their works before a most just and powerful Judge, are melancholy tidings. But to those who adorn the Gospel with a suitable conversation, and live here as they expect their reward in heaven—what an inward delight and complacency is it to consider that their Lord is risen, and that after a short pilgrimage on earth He will receive them into Heaven, and give them possession of those mansions of bliss which he is gone before to prepare for them? This will make it a true Festival to us, a day of glad tidings and great joy.

In the mean-time we must remember that, on this day, particularly, we are invited to the supper of the Lamb, the communion of his body and blood; there to have the pardon of our sins sealed to us, and to renew our covenant with God in vows and purposes of future obedience. And what time can be more proper to make our peace with God than that day on which He declared himself reconciled to mankind? If we would render the day of his resurrection a day of joy & glad

ness to us, we shall commemorate his death at his holy Table. And, remembering the benefits derived from his rising from the grave, we shall appropriate them to ourselves, by "dying unto sin and rising again unto righteousness."

' May God grant so blessed a change to be wrought
' in every heart, that when the awful hour approaches
' in which the Trump of God shall call, "Arise ye dead
" & come to judgment," we may be received, Blessed
' Jesus, into that Kingdom which Thou hast prepared
' for all that love & fear Thee! And oh! before Thou
' pronounce the irrevocable sentence, apply the benefits
' of Thy Resurrection to "the works of thine own
" hands," then shall we unite in singing with the An-
' gelic Choir, This is the day which the Lord hath
' made, we will rejoice & be glad in it; then shall we
' celebrate, in grateful hymns of praise, thy Glory &
' our Redemption, when "time shall be no more!"

Theoph^s. J. St. John.

Entered at Stationers' Hall.

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